

# Tabernacle organist was key member of LDS music team

**Obituary »** He had important role in rehabilitation of the Assembly Hall, purchase of organs.

**By CATHERINE REESE  
NEWTON**

*The Salt Lake Tribune*

Robert M. Cundick, organist at the Salt Lake Tabernacle from 1965 to 1991 and a prominent composer, died Thursday at his Salt Lake City home of causes incident to age. He was 89.

“Bob Cundick was certainly one of the most important and influential Latter-day Saint musicians of his generation, and perhaps the entire history of [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints],” said longtime friend Roger Miller, emeritus professor of musicology at the University of Utah and past member of the LDS Church’s General Music Committee. Miller cited Cundick’s contributions as a composer, organist, teacher and organizing force behind major projects such as the rehabilitation of the Assembly Hall on Temple Square; the acquisition of organs there, in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building and at the University of Utah’s Libby Gardner Concert Hall; a significant upgrade to the Tabernacle organ; and concert series in Salt Lake City and Jerusalem.

“He led the fundraising



*Courtesy photo*

**Robert Cundick was a prominent composer and organist at the LDS Tabernacle in Salt Lake City.**

program for [the Assembly Hall and JSMB] instruments, which is a great deal of work — he spent literally thousands of hours outside his normal work schedule to make sure those marvelous instruments were available to all visitors,” said Jerold Ottley, director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir from 1975 to 2000.

Cundick also was instrumental in upgrading the Temple Square practice facilities, including three organs used for rehearsal, said John Longhurst, who joined Cundick on the Tabernacle organ staff in 1977 and was senior organist there from 1991 to 2007.

More than one fellow musician described Cundick as fearless.

“He would take on almost

anything if he felt it was necessary and useful to his church and community,” Ottley said.

Miller remembered how Cundick “fought tooth and nail” for the preservation of the Assembly Hall after some church leaders suggested it be demolished. He was principal designer of the hall’s organ, with its distinctive facade; pitching the small building on Temple Square’s southwest corner as a fine recital venue, he organized the long-running Temple Square Concert Series. Likewise, Miller said, Cundick was “the genius behind the [BYU] Jerusalem Center concert series,” which started as a venue for immigrant musicians who had nowhere else to perform.

Composer Crawford Gates, a close friend for more than 60 years, described Cundick as “a composer of the first rank and a friend of the first rank.”

“He was a wonderful colleague, very much concerned that the choir staff work as a team,” Longhurst said. “There was a very warm collegiality among the staff.”

Best-known for his oratorio “The Redeemer,” Cundick wrote in a style that was “forward-looking, but at the same time very accessible to the average listener,” Ottley said.

“He was kind of a Renaissance man. ... He leaves a huge, huge void in the organ scene and the LDS music scene,” said principal Tabernacle organist Richard Elliott, one of many younger musicians whom Cundick mentored.

Born in Salt Lake City in 1926, Cundick earned bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees in music from the University of Utah, where his mentors included the eminent Utah composer Leroy Robertson and legendary Tabernacle organist Alexander Schreiner. After serving in the U.S. Merchant Marine during World War II, he married Charlotte “Cholly” Clark in 1949; she survives him, as do their five children, 23 grandchildren and 38 great-grandchildren; a brother, Bert; and a sister, Carol Hoopes. A funeral is scheduled for Wednesday at noon at the Salt Lake Wilford Stake, 1765 E. 3080 South.